CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

From times to times, video games have been experiencing significant development since they were first created in 1958. The development started from simple games such as *Pong* and *Spacewar!* that had no complexity on their gameplay mechanism to the games that had complex mechanism, with narrative included, such as *Watch Dogs* and *Assassin Creeds*. Ahead of the 21st century, video games began to include the elements of narrative starting from simple to complex narration, and they required the player to decide on options provided carefully. Thus, because of the involvement of narrative, video games are considered as a new story telling medium; a significant perspective against ludologists who claims that video game is not narrative.

As other story telling mediums namely films, video games have specific genres and sub-genres, such as Action, Strategy, Role Played Game, Simulations, Racing, Sports, and Adventure. In fact, they also often serve mixed genres to give a greater excitement and experience to the player. Among many genres of video games that are circulated widely, Role Played Game (RPG) is one of the genres that prioritize complex-narration and gameplay mechanism as its elements. The complexities begin from making the character, customization, to the options of choices that could determine the storyline. Although, video game as story-telling mediums are still debated by narratologist and ludologist, game designers believe

that people need to lose themselves from the real world and the only way to do that is to create another world, another story, another universe; in other words, something that could immerse them. RPG is one of the genres that has a power to bring the player to their immersive word and immersive story. As a player, it is argued that video games always evolve through years to come, and that playing a game containing a story may serve the feeling of having purposes or goals, that is, not only to finish the game but also to discover the story of it.

Mass Effect Series, as one of RPG, is argued to have the power of immersions. This game is a science fiction action role-playing third person shooter video game series developed by the Canadian company, BioWare, and released for video game consoles and PC. The trilogy tell a journey of a soldier by the name of Commander Shepard, whose mission is to save the galaxy from a race of powerful mechanical beings known as the Reapers, who exterminated virtually all sentient organic life in the galaxy as part of a recurrent cycle of genocide for an unknown purpose. The first game shows Shepard investigating Saren, a Reaper's agent who is operating under the guidance of Sovereign, a Reaper left behind in the Milky Way tens of thousands of years before. Sovereign is a vanguard whose purpose is to trigger the imminent return of the Reaper fleet hibernating in extra-galactic dark space, restarting the process of extermination. The second game takes place two years later, and shows Shepard battling the Collectors, an alien race abducting entire human colonies in a plan to help the Reapers return to the Milky Way. The final game of Shepard's trilogy centers on the final battle against the Reapers.

All three games have received critical acclaim for their storyline, characters, romances, voice acting, choices, and the depth of the galaxy. In fact, the third serial of the game has been considered as the best for its challenging gameplay, hard choices, and its story depth. Furthermore, the game has two moral options (Paragon and Renegade)[1] that have been designed as the character's response to every dialogue as a dialogue tree, and sometimes emerge in critical event as an option and will determine the game's character ways of life, depending on the player actions in choosing these two moral options. Unlike the previous series of the game, when the options of choices and the stories are about information of the galaxies conflicts, in the third serial the player has to solve the conflicts by taking sides or bring peace to them. The result of these decisions could affect the flow of the story and its overall narratives.

Unfortunately, narrative in video games could not be studied traditionally because of their interactivity. Unlike reading a book or watching a film, in video games, the player can make choices during playing and those choices may affect the flow of the story in this game. Therefore, with the involvement of the player in determining the flow of the story, and how the game itself can persuade the player to take an action in the game, I discuss about how the narrative are formed and the factors that could affect overall narrative formation of *Mass Effect 3*. Jorgensen's study (2010) has contributed on the fruitful video-games discussion. Her

[1] Paragon is the morality scale through compassionate and legendary actions. Being a positive, kind, and friendly player, during conversations and stories, will make the player more of a Paragon, while Renegade is the morality scale through mean, cruel, and merciless actions.

perspectives focused on game characters as a narrative device for its ability to provide information and the character's backstory to the player. Different from her, this research focused on the process of narrative formation and the factors that can affect it.

1.2 Research Questions

According to issue narrative formation suggested, the research questions may be formulated as followed,

1. How narrative formation is formed in *Mass Effect* 3?
2. What factors affect the overall narrative in Mass Effect 3?

1.3 Objectives

According to issues of research questions suggested, the objectives may be formulated as followed,

1. to discover the process of narrative formation of Mass Effect 3; and
2. to identify the factors affecting the overall narrative in Mass Effect 3.

1.4 Significance to Knowledge

This research is expected to have significant benefits, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it is expected to give knowledge about narrative forms in video games, particularly *Mass Effect 3*, and the factors that affect narrative in it. Practically, it is expected to give understanding that, in spite of the

negative comments, video games provide practices to decide options brought into the life, and suggest an idea of a simply medium.

1.5 Framework of Theories

Narrative in video games is argued not to be able to be analyzed by traditional narrative theories because of video games' requiremet for player's interactions. The possibilities of player's abilities of determining the flow of the story in Mass Effect 3 depend on how the game presents the story to the player. Therefore, I use *Future Narrative* (FN), which was founded by Bode and next developed by Domsch, to analyze narrative formation of Mass Effect 3. According to Bode (Domsch, 2013: 1), the future is a space of yet unrealized potentiality and by allowing the player to enter situations that fork into different branches and to actually experience that 'what happens next' may well depend upon the player; to preserve the future as future is Future Narrative.

According to game's rule, a game has to make situations that have possibility of different outcomes, which depends on the player actions, decisions, values and motivations. This possibility of different outcomes is one of characteristic in the multiform story, usually called multi-linear story. Murray (1997) sees the computer as a new medium with great capacity for telling stories, stories in this medium that present a single situation or plotline in multiple versions will be called multiform stories. According to Murray (1997: 98; 126), *Immersion* and *Agency* are parts of the components that characterize the multiform story. Immersion is about "the experience of being transported to an elaborately

simulated place", while Agency is "the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices". Meanwhile, Domsch (2013: 31) states that video games contain narratives through narrative forms; it is helpful to enumerate the form and classify them according to their nature and mode of operation. I used the narrative forms as parts of FN to analyze narrative in video game. With these theories, I would like to see how the narrative formed in the game and what factors that affect the narrative.